

Art Unit: 2446

EXAMINER'S AMENDMENT

An examiner's amendment to the record appears below. Should the changes and/or additions be unacceptable to applicant, an amendment may be filed as provided by 37 CFR 1.312. To ensure consideration of such an amendment, it MUST be submitted no later than the payment of the issue fee.

Authorization for this examiner's amendment was given in a telephone interview and email with Roger Phipps on 2/12/2010.

The application has been amended as follows:

Art Unit: 2446

Listing of Claims

The following listing of claims replaces all previous listings. The listing of claims is as follows:

1. **(Currently Amended)** A multiple port unit adapted for coupling one or more computers to multiple peripheral devices over a network, said multiple port unit comprising:

plural network ports, each of said network ports being configured to couple the multiple port unit to a computer via one or more hubs over a respective network link;

plural communication serial ports, each of said communication serial ports being configured to couple the multiple port unit to a peripheral device; and

a control unit to interrogate the network links and to communicatively couple said communication serial ports to a selected one of said network ports based on the interrogation of the network links, the control unit further determining whether it is time to interrogate the network links; and

the control unit interrogating the network links including checking an availability of a computer over each of the network links including comparing a single current time value received from [a]the computer with a previous single time value received from [such]the computer, wherein each of the single time values received from the computer reflects a period of time from a particular reference ~~point~~time of a day and wherein the control unit determines whether the computer is available solely on whether the current single time value is greater than the previous single time value;

Art Unit: 2446

wherein said network ports are configured to couple the multiple port unit to plural computers and wherein said control unit is configured to interrogate each of the plural computers and to select an active computer to control the peripheral devices based on the interrogation of the computers;

further wherein the control unit is configured to identify a network link as not operating properly based on the interrogation and to prevent further interrogation thereof for a preset period of time.

2. **(Canceled)**

3. **(Currently Amended)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim [[2]] 1, wherein said control unit interrogates the computers over each of the network links in an alternating periodic manner.

4. **(Original)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim 3, wherein said network ports comprise Ethernet ports.

5. **(Previously Presented)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim 4, wherein said communication serial ports comprise serial interfaces.

6. **(Original)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim 4, further comprising two redundant power supplies.

Art Unit: 2446

7. (Original) A multiple port unit as recited in claim 1, wherein said control unit is configured to interrogate the network links using a network carrier signal.

8. **(Currently Amended)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim [[2]] 1, wherein said control unit is configured to interrogate the computers using Packet Internet Groper.

9. **(Currently Amended)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim [[2]] 1, comprising two network ports and 8 communications ports.

10. **(Currently Amended)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim [[2]] 1, further comprising a data bus coupled to said control unit, said network ports and said communication serial ports.

11-39 **(Canceled)**

40. **(Currently amended)** A method of coupling plural peripheral devices to computers, said method comprising the steps of:

interrogating the status of plural network connections with a control unit of a multiple port unit having plural network ports coupled to the computers via one or more hubs over the plural network connections and plural communication serial ports coupled to peripheral devices, the control unit determining whether it is time to interrogate prior to performing the interrogation; and

Art Unit: 2446

coupling the plural communication serial ports to one of the network connections based on the results of said step of interrogating the status of plural network connections; and

the interrogating including checking an availability of a computer over each of the network links including comparing a single current time value received from [a]the computer with a previous single time value received from [such]the computer, wherein each of the single time values received from the computer reflects a period of time from a particular reference ~~point~~time of a day and wherein the availability of a computer is solely determined by whether the current single time value is greater than the previous single time value;

interrogating the status of plural computers respectively coupled to the network connections; and controlling the peripheral devices based on the results of said step of interrogating the status of plural computers; and

identifying a network link as not operating properly based on the interrogating and to prevent further interrogating thereof for a preset period of time.

41. **(Canceled)**

42. (Currently amended) A method as recited in claim ~~[[41]]~~40, wherein said step of interrogating the status of plural network connections comprises detecting a carrier on each network connection.

Art Unit: 2446

43. (Currently amended) A method as recited in claim ~~[[41]]~~40, wherein said step of interrogating the status of plural computers comprises using Packet Internet Groper.

44. (Currently amended) A method as recited in claim ~~[[41]]~~40, further comprising the step of maintaining a record of the status of each computer and each network connection in the control unit.

45. (Currently amended) A method as recited in claim ~~[[41]]~~40, further comprising the step of transferring status data between the computers at the direction of the control unit.

46. (Previously presented) A multiple port unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the interrogation is effected by the control unit sending a packet.

47. (Previously Presented) A multiple port unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the interrogation of the network links relates to whether a particular network link is working properly.

48. (Previously Presented) A multiple port unit as recited in claim 1, wherein the control unit being further configured to determine whether it is time to interrogate the network links includes a determination if a preset time for switching network links has elapsed.

49. (canceled)

Art Unit: 2446

50. **(Currently amended)** A multiple port unit as recited in claim [[49]]1, wherein said control unit communicatively couples said communication serial ports to the selected one of said network ports to avoid the network link not operating properly.

51. **(Canceled)**

52. **(Canceled)**

Any comments considered necessary by applicant must be submitted no later than the payment of the issue fee and, to avoid processing delays, should preferably accompany the issue fee. Such submissions should be clearly labeled "Comments on Statement of Reasons for Allowance."

CORRESPONDANCE INFORMATION

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to BENJAMIN R. BRUCKART whose telephone number is (571)272-3982. The examiner can normally be reached on 9:00-5:30PM.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Jeffrey C. Pwu can be reached on (571) 272-6798. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

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Application/Control Number: 09/708,492

Page 10

Art Unit: 2446

Primary Examiner
Art Unit 2446

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